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WASTE CAUSED BY PREVENTABLE DISEASE OF INTESTINAL ORIGIN

By VICTOR G. HEISER, M.D.,

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In a general way much has been said about the waste caused by disease, but not enough emphasis has been placed upon the enormous amount of pain, misery, unhappiness, sickness and death, that is caused by preventable intestinal disease. It is well within the bounds of conservatism to state that over 127,000 persons in the United States die annually from causes acting in and through the intestines, in other words, from swallowing something unclean which might easily be avoided. To this must be added the hundreds of thousands who are made ill and incapacitated.

The economic losses are estimated at enormous totals. For instance, Doctor Allen Smith, of the University of Pennsylvania, states that hookworm disease in the South causes between \$250,000,-000 and \$500,000,000 damage per annum. Stiles states that the very conservative estimate of 50 cents loss per week for each person suffering from hookworm disease gives a total of \$50,000,000 per annum. Ellis estimates that typhoid fever costs the United States \$350,000,000 annually. For instance, before the city of Pittsburgh had a safe water supply, typhoid fever in one year was estimated to have cost \$3,142,000. Ellis also estimates that in the state of South Carolina alone the hookworm losses are \$30,000,000 per annum. The State Board of Health of Louisiana estimates an annual loss of \$3,000,000 from hookworm disease in that state. Gunn estimates that the loss from hookworm disease in one mine in California which employs 300 men was \$20,000 per year. The construction of the St. Gotthard tunnel through the Alps was almost completely stopped by disease among the laborers until it was discovered that the illness was caused by the lack of proper disposal of human excrement. Again, Stiles estimates that 30 per cent of the education in the southern states is wasted owing to the backward mentality caused by hookworm infection. Clayton Lane has just published a statement showing that the entire war debt of India could be paid by wages which are lost by Indian hookworm victims,

and yet we know that wages in India are a mere pittance compared to American standards. So far we have mentioned only typhoid and hookworm infection. To these must be added the losses caused by diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera, and a host of other diseases, which are caused by swallowing something unclean.

Then there is also an enormous indirect loss. Hazen, for instance, showed that each death from typhoid fever avoided caused the prevention of two or three other deaths from other diseases. This theory has frequently received confirmation. For example, in Manila, in periods during which water from an uninhabited watershed was used there were 3,000 less deaths per annum than when the water supply was taken from an inhabited watershed. The deaths from practically all causes were decreased by changing the source of the drinking water. For instance, there was a reduction in the number of deaths from pneumonia, tuberculosis, nephritis, and other affections not ordinarily associated with intestinal disease.

THE REMEDY

It may be well to ask what can be done to prevent this enormous waste. The answer is simple. It is only necessary to provide for the safe disposal of the excrement of the entire population. In most of our cities the problem has been largely solved through the water carriage of sewage. Yet even in Philadelphia there are thousands of open privies which may be a menace to health through the agency of flies and other sources of contact which may cause contamination of human food and drink. The great bulk of the trouble, however, is in rural communities. It has been the popular belief that the health of those who live in the country is much better than the health of those who live in the city. This could probably be made so by the observance of ordinary hygienic precautions.

But let us look at the actual conditions. In a survey of more than 200,000 school children in New York City compared with 200,000 school children in rural Pennsylvania, it was shown that disease was at least four times more prevalent in rural Pennsylvania. Death rates in the country are higher. A large percentage of the ill health in the country districts is due to primitive latrine conditions. There are many areas in this country in which there is no latrine whatsoever. By careful surveys it has been demonstrated in many sections of the United States that only 50 per cent of the

houses have latrines of any kind. The remedy is very simple and easy of application. No great engineering works are necessary, and the method of prevention can be demonstrated to the most ignorant. There is no community in this country which does not have sufficient resources to carry out the safe disposal of body discharges, and when that is done, typhoid, dysentery, hookworm and a host of other diseases will disappear.

The meagre evidence here presented shows that the loss caused by only a few of the intestinal diseases will total to more than a billion dollars per year. Efficiency is the watchword of the day. The struggle for existence after the war will probably be greater than ever. Shall we enter the contest with this handicap, or shall we strike it from us?

NATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND HEALTH INSURANCE

BY JOHN B. ANDREWS, PH.D.

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"When the workers return from the trenches they will not be satisfied with flowers or brass bands." This sentiment, recently expressed by one of our loyal and most influential leaders of organized labor, may be welcomed as a "healthy indication" or opposed as a "seething menace," according to one's point of view. It conforms rather conservatively to the reported pronouncement of Mr. Schwab that "within two years the workers will be running this country." Mr. Schwab for this declaration was publicly denounced as a threatening Bolshevik, but presently he was placed in charge of the nation's shipbuilding, the most urgent and critical job in our war preparations. Politically the sentiment is in harmony with the expression of the official historian of the British army in France, who recently said: "I predict that our next Parliament will be a labor Parliament." And it is most effectively and eloquently reënforced in a recent letter by President Wilson who declares:

Every man with any vision must see that the real test of justice and right action is presently to come as it never came before. The men in the trenches, who have been freed from the economic serfdom to which some of them have been accustomed, will, it is likely, return to their homes with a new view and a new im-